

BOOK REVIEWS

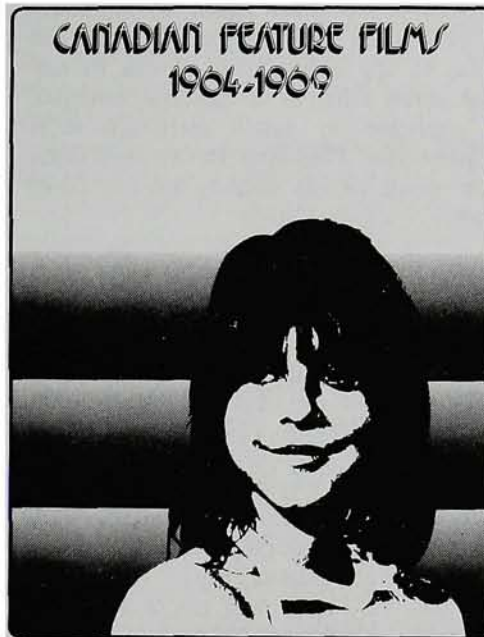
Canadian Feature Films 1964-1969 by Piers Handling

Canadian Filmography Series, number ten. Canadian Film Institute. 1976. 64 pp. Stiff paperback, 8 1/2" x 11", Illus.

This 64-page, large-format book (which is both too handsome and too important to be termed a booklet) is of immense value as a work of reference and also offers pleasurable reading to anyone even casually concerned with recent Canadian films. It is the largest of three such publications from the Canadian Film Institute, although covering the shortest period and, since it is succinct and in no way overwritten, this fact is a cheering reminder that our production is increasing by leaps and bounds, even though, month by month, these movements can seem more like staggers. (The two previous issues in the series, both by Peter Morris, covered the periods 1913-1940 and 1941-1963. They are still available.)

Piers Handling, of the CFI, has achieved a magnificent feat of organizing his material, fusing facts and comments, erudition and occasional wry amusement. He gives full credits, plot synopses, production notes and critical reaction by himself and others on over 100 features – defined as running 60 minutes or more – ranging from the celebrated, like **Nobody Waved Goodbye**, **The Luck of Ginger Coffey** and **Le viol d'une jeune fille douce**, to the obscure and bizarre. Something called **The Naked Flame** starring Dennis O'Keefe achieved one showing in Edmonton, we learn, while **Sex and the Lonely Woman**, shot in Uruguay, has Canadian connections you wouldn't even dream of. Famous and forgotten, serious and silly, the features of a six-year period then unparalleled in this country's film history are all here, as they should be, for history is a mixture of the tremendous and the trivial. At least, if anything relevant is *not* here, I haven't spotted the omission. Instead, it has been stimulating to check the

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facts I remembered while learning the things I never knew and rediscovering what was half-recalled. The pleasure brought to mind by the artistic suc-

Six European Directors: Essays on the Meaning of Film Style by Peter Harcourt

Penguin Books "Pelican" Series, England, 1974. \$2.50.

We are indeed fortunate as Canadians to have in Peter Harcourt a lucid and probing film critic; *Six European Directors* is, as well as being an excellent work of criticism, above all a textbook on the art of critical judgement, particularly in the area of film.

Harcourt opens with a long essay on criticism, referring to various schools but concentrating on his own approach. His lucid statement does indeed help us to understand the structure of the six essays to follow but, more, it assists the reader in confidently making sense of a film to which he first responds in a darkened room, separated from other spectators in his one-to-one relationship with the images on the screen. As the spectator emerges from the theatre, his personal response is refined through discussion and reading of the critics. Harcourt has built his critical philosophy on this very natural pat-

tern, giving it strength and direction by the kinds of critical questions he suggests, by pointing out that a response can and should have reference to other areas of the viewer's knowledge and by trusting the subconscious in responding and playing with the imagery. In short, Harcourt argues that one's individual response is a basis for understanding a film and this understanding need not be only on the level of incident which, as he points out, is often the only level discussed by many reviewers.

The opening essay is prefaced with two quotes – the first from Henry James holding that the most valued response to life and art is that which is true to one's emotional and private allegiances; the other from Leonardo da Vinci who claims that "one has no right to love or hate anything if one has not acquired a thorough knowledge of its nature." Harcourt hopes that the critic would try to steer a critical path between these divergent poles:

Clive Denton

"...We undoubtedly need scholarship to help us understand a given work of art, to help us to honor Leonardo's ideal. But scholarship

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in the arts is secondary. Response is primary. The facts that are most useful to us are those which help us to answer the questions about a given film that we are asking ourselves, questions always related to those primordial ones: What does this mean? Why is it affecting me like this? How does it relate to other films that I have seen?

"So when discussing films, we can approach them from two contrary directions – the direction of knowledge and the direction of ignorance. Knowledge certainly helps us more perfectly to understand our own experiences and may lead us through the superficialities of an intellectual curiosity about something to a deeper, more personal involvement in it. But generally, it seems to me, knowledge about a work of art becomes most meaningful when it follows response, when it illuminates the instinctive obscurities of a personal involvement." (p. 20-21)

In the six essays which follow, Harcourt does not betray his critical philosophy – he does not burden the reader with his or others' scholarship, nor with cinematic jargon. Let me explain Harcourt's use of scholarship by discussing the first essay, "The Reality of Sergei Eisenstein". While referring to the enormous amount of analytical criticism by Eisenstein and others, Harcourt interprets that torrent of analysis as an extension of his argument that scholarship can often obscure (and perhaps, in the case of Eisenstein, is meant to obscure) and make the viewer incapable of having or admitting an emotional response. In looking directly at the films, in rejecting that mass of "external clarification" and the generalized statements on montage that wash the viewing of all films by Eisenstein and his Russian contemporaries, Harcourt has given us a breath of fresh air on the subject, concluding that Eisenstein "remains an enigma – a compelling fusion of grand designs with a kind of human emptiness."

The prodigious work of the six directors (besides Eisenstein: Jean Renoir, Luis Bunuel, Ingmar Bergman,

Federico Fellini and Jean-Luc Godard) presents an enormous task to the critic and Harcourt has proven himself more than equal to it. Each essay covers in a critical way all the work of the artist; this is not to say that each film of a specific cineaste is analyzed in detail although it is evident that Harcourt has indeed done that work in his search for the filmmaker's "view of life":

"...I am trying to do basically one thing: I am anxious to explain the form of each director's films in terms of the 'view of life' that has necessitated it...I tend thus to concentrate on the films where I feel the director has been most successful in resolving his artistic problems... Any breakdown in the form of his films is inextricably tied to inadequacies within the view of life at the base of them." (p. 198)

What we have then are a series of critically precise and brief (considering the area covered) essays which can be read separately but maintain a coherence through critical structure and point of view. In this, Harcourt's "Conclusion" is helpful in seeing the six directors within a general relationship in the European setting.

The footnotes are excellent and suggest, of course, further reading. This is a terrific book for any formal or informal student of film, an optimistic work which insists that good criticism is possible for all lovers of the cinema. Peter Harcourt is generously assisting us in that process.

Eleanor Beattie

Canadian Federation of Film Societies Index of 16 mm and 35 mm Feature-Length Films Available in Canada 1976

ISSN 0316-5019. Available through P.O. Box 484, Terminal A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1E4. \$27.50 (prepaid \$25.00).

Although the Canadian Federation of Film Societies was involved in the production of an index of feature film availability in this country as early as 1947, publication was sporadic and there were long periods of hibernation. However, in the late 1960s, three members of the Toronto Film Society banded together with a former TFS officer to investigate the possibility of using computer technology to resume publication. Under the joint

sponsorship of TFS and the CFFS, and with some very temporary financing from the former to cover printing costs, the first issue was published in 1970.

As a goodly number of Canadian film societies are located in smaller centres, remote from the offices of the many Canadian distributors handling specialized films, the Index met with a good response from the groups affiliated with the CFFS. However, there being absolutely no other comparable reference to feature film availability in Canada, it met with even greater demand from libraries, audiovisual departments of educational organizations, and even film distributors themselves, who wished to know what their competitors were handling. An up-dated publication was brought out in 1973, and since then the publication has appeared annually, while coverage has been widened to include listings in 35 mm as well as 16 mm.

In the 255 pages of its main section, the 1975 edition lists 8,919 titles of feature films and long documentaries, distributed by 45 organizations whose addresses and telephone numbers are listed in the front pages. This issue also included, for the first time, a 35-page listing of titles by director, and just under a hundred pages of listings under names of featured players.

All entries are listed in computerized alphabetical order by title in the original language, with all non-English titles being cross-referenced to alternate titles. Following the film title, and any alternate listings, each entry contains such information as year of release, country where produced, original language, original ratio, color or b/w, original running time, director and featured players. This is followed by information for each print version, listing distributor, running time, language version, color, etc. Where the 1975 listing includes a change from the previous edition (including a change in the alphabetical order of listing) this is marked by an asterisk opposite the title, while additions are indicated with a plus sign.

Some purists of the print media have been heard to mutter criticism

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A graduate of Queen's University, Douglas S. Wilson was for almost two decades the editor of a Canadian business publication and has, since 1968, been treasurer and membership director of Toronto Film Society.

of the book's format, in that rather than being typeset, it is lithographed from computer print-out data. This format is, however, the essential factor in making possible an unsubsidized price of \$25 (\$20 to CFFS members for their first copy) and with the photo-reduction ratio having been well chosen, the entries are fully legible.

A number of further innovations are included in the new edition which will shortly be coming off the presses. On the editorial side, there will be a third supplement added to the listings by director and featured players, listing all firms handled by *each* distributor. In addition, there is to be cross-referencing between 16 mm and 35 mm versions, which in many instances have different distributors.

A further editorial innovation is the provision of a French introduction, including a key to the symbols and abbreviations used in the listings for each title, while on the commercial side, advertising by distributors will

now be included. The bilingualization should greatly expand the market for the Index in Quebec and thus permit economies of scale; combined with the additional revenue from advertising, the Index Committee should be able to provide even further value for the \$25 price.

Every reviewer must have his quibble, and this one would point out a few discrepancies in spelling and between subject and verb on the introductory page of the 1975 edition, where a little more editorial checking would have paid dividends. Other print purists have complained that the listings are in a computer's idea of correct alphabetical sequence — as a result of which, it is claimed, some searchers have missed listings actually in the volume, but not in the alphabetical order commonly employed in making up an index.

These, however, are mere specks on the total picture, which is that of a very commendable achievement, and in any event, they are unlikely to

apply to the 1976 edition, for which the introduction has been completely rewritten. Thus, without qualification, it can be stated that the *CFFS Index* is an essential tool for everyone involved in film programming, whether it be for a film society, courses in film studios or operating a repertory cinema, and the \$25 cost is money well spent.

Tribute should also be paid to those responsible: Arne Ljungström, who handled administration; Pat Thompson for innumerable calls on film distributors researching the titles they had available, and Austin Whitten for the computer programming. In previous years, Aileen Whitten was responsible for data entry but for the upcoming issue, this has been handled by the administrator and programmer, considerably increasing their workload. All in all, despite these quibbles from a one-time editor in the print medium, a very professional job.

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